

STATEMENT BY

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**DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES
FORT STEWART, GEORGIA**

BEFORE THE

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ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

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Senator Chambliss, it is a pleasure to appear before you today at this field hearing to discuss families and children. Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield is a power projection platform and has a heavy operation tempo. Deployment, training, and field exercises are frequent and numerous often occurring back to back. The op-tempo places stress on families and soldiers. The impact of these stresses can be: domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, financial difficulties, suicides, fatigue, an increased divorce rate, and a lack of parental involvement and family cohesiveness. The Army and Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield must continue to work diligently and be proactive to provide programs and services to address the issues of being a rapid deployment installation.

An issue of concern is the use of embedded media. Embedded media has both a positive and negative impact in relation to deployment. The positive aspect is the affiliation of the embedded reporter with the Division and the Units. This offers a positive image of the military and provides the nation with a view of the soldier who is committed and dedicated to defending his/her country. The negative aspect of

embedded media is the reporting of casualties by unit and/or division instead of utilizing a generic term such as coalition forces. The stress of watching and learning about casualties not only creates stress, but on occasion can incite panic in some of the family members.

The other issue involves Family Readiness Group (FRG) leaders. The FRG leaders feel strongly that a paid FRG liaison position should be established at Brigade and/or Battalion level to alleviate the stress currently placed on FRG leaders as a result of heavy operational tempo.

The 3d Infantry Division (Mech) is comprised of eight brigades (one physically located at Fort Benning), and four separate Battalions, with 20,000 soldiers and approximately 33,000 family members. The 3d ID is a highly deployable, power projection platform and the largest military installation east of the Mississippi River. In addition to the deployment of Active Component soldiers, Fort Stewart has taken on an additional requirement of mobilizing and deploying National Guard and Reserve Soldiers to various locations. More than 13,000 National Guard and Reserve Soldiers have been mobilized and deployed since Oct 02.

The 3d Infantry Division looked at lessons learned during the Bosnia, Kosovo, Africa and Afghanistan deployments and began to prepare soldiers and families to prepare for the possibility of a large-scale contingency operation.

PREPARATION FOR DEPLOYMENT:

All units, at Battalion level, coordinated with Army Community Service (ACS) for deployment briefings for soldiers and family members alike prior to deployment. ACS staff were accompanied by personnel from the Finance Office, American Red Cross and the Staff Judge Advocate and briefed soldiers and family members on the stresses of deployment, programs and services available, communications availability in the theatre, finance and money concerns, Red Cross Emergency messaging to the theater, legal requirements prior to and during deployments, tax affects of deployments and, mailing restrictions.

During Desert Storm/Desert Shield many families left the installation and the support personnel were unable to assist and provide services to these families. As a result of this "lesson learned" ACS in conjunction with the Public Affairs Office (PAO), developed and deployed a mass media campaign to encourage the families to stay at the installation during deployment. Brigade and Battalion Command Teams were instrumental in sending that message to the families. The media campaign included a video entitled "Stay at the Installation." The campaign to encourage families to stay in the local area was also promoted by the surrounding civilian communities. The partnership between the local civilian communities and the installation were instrumental in creating an environment in which the families felt truly supported.

Smart Books and Battle Books were developed for the FRG leadership prior to the deployment with in-depth information on support, services and how to resolve issues. It

was a "Desk Side Reference Guide" for FRGs, and had all the written material (finance requirements, Red Cross message guidance, RDC Numbers, how to assist a person in stress, etc.) in one book. The books were provided to FRG leaders providing them a ready guide for resource and referral.

ACS Personnel conducted numerous trainings for FRG Leaders and Rear Detachment Personnel. These trainings included FRG Basic Leaders Training for both FRG Personnel and RDC Personnel (to understand each others roles and responsibilities), and Crisis Team Training. The Crisis Team was developed prior to the Kosovo deployment of 00. The training was based on the assumption that deployments can result in deaths, and FRG roles in causality are unofficial. It was determined that FRG's and RDC personnel needed to be educated about the casualty notification process, stages of grief, and the FRG roles in casualty. ACS, AG Casualty and the Chaplains provided this training. This information and knowledge was used during the Iraqi Freedom Combat, and has been essential in making the difficult process of supporting families during combat casualties easier for the FRGs. Training was heavily attended and made mandatory for the Rear Detachment Personnel. The combined training inclusive of FRG leaders and RDC personnel resulted in the participants connecting to each other early in the deployment process.

SUSTAINMENT DURING DEPLOYMENTS:

Sustaining families through a deployment can be difficult. The Directorate of Community Activities and Services (DCAS) coordinated numerous activities for the

families to include "Spouses Night Out", mom and youth aerobic classes, shopping trips, powder puff classes, Women's Expo, etc. In addition to Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs being increased and geared to the families, the Education Staff re-focused their efforts to the families by opening up the Leadership Skills Education Program (LSEP), which offers classes in time management, leadership skills, strategic planning and computer skills to family members. Additionally, college class enrollments increased tremendously. Free and reduced childcare was provided after hours and one Saturday per month for families who wanted to participate in the MWR Programs. One free night of childcare was provided to each battalion for the monthly meeting.

The Waiting Spouses group is a program for families whose soldiers are on unaccompanied or hardship tours, and is coordinated by ACS' Relocation Program. This Group became critical in the support of families of the "Shelf Replacement Soldiers". Because shelf replacement soldiers were sent where they were needed, based on rank and MOS, the families usually had no idea what Brigade or Battalion the soldier was assigned to. The Relocation Program Manager at ACS took an aggressive approach in reaching those families and ensuring they were kept informed and supported by ACS programs.

For families, information is key to survival through deployments. FRG Leaders and Rear Detachment Personnel were provided constant information on current events, activities and programs available to the families. This information was disseminated in a variety of ways to include, email, phone and media print. An Executive FRG

consisting of Senior Level Spouses was formed for the purpose of disseminating information and rumor control. Fort Benning, via VTC, was included in the Executive FRG with the Senior Spouses and Senior Command chairing each meeting. This method of disseminating information proved most effective.

ACS became the conduit of in kind donations given to the soldiers and families of the installation. The outpouring was extremely large, and ACS developed a process to get the product to the families through the Brigade Rear Detachment Personnel. Donations came from individuals and corporations across America. Support from the local veterans groups, churches, businesses and general public was incredible. The local Military Affairs Committees developed a discount card for families of deployed soldiers to receive discounts of products and services, local business provided door prizes to FRGs, and billboards and marquees of most local businesses had "We support our Troops" messages.

Family care plans were validated and in order with primary guardians identified. There have been no major issues regarding children of single or dual military during the recent deployment.

RE-INTEGRATION PROGRAM

An extensive reunion program has been developed incorporating mental health professionals, social work professionals, chaplains and medical doctors. Family member briefings, soldiers briefings, couples classes, single soldiers classes, children

classes, mental health check-ups, stress management and domestic violence classes are given prior to re-deployment and during the re-integration phase. Additionally, soldiers will be required to report to duty (with liberal leave) for 10 days after re-deployment for observation. Commanders will be fully trained for signs of stress and will utilize installation resources for referral. The family member re-deployment classes have been initiated and have been heavily attended. Child and Youth Services (CYS) have provided free childcare for these briefings and the briefings have been well attended.

Schools

The two Department of Defense Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) on Fort Stewart serve over 1800 children in grades K-6. Both schools have a Pre-K program. The curriculum utilized at the schools was developed and directed by Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA). The off post schools in Liberty County are more than 50% military affiliated students. The administration, staff, and teachers are sensitive to the military lifestyle. Graduation and curriculum requirements for off post schools are determined by the State Department of Education. Public middle schools (Grades 6-8) offer band, chorus, football, dance team, cheerleading and other enrichment options as extra curricular activities. The Liberty County Middle Schools curriculum also supports the team teaching concept. Both on and off post schools offer a gifted and talented program, although the curriculums for both programs are approached differently. The off post schools also offer exploratory classes for Middle School Students (keyboarding, visual arts, etc.).

Both on and off post schools provide excellent special needs programs for students.

Both the local and DODEA school systems go above and beyond to provide services.

The off post schools have adopted and implemented the No Child Left Behind initiative.

Off post schools also offer additional tutoring after school and Saturday school for those students who are falling behind in their studies and need additional help.

School personnel tell us that military parents are significantly involved in the Parent Teacher Organizations in public schools. Parental involvement at schools, both on post at Fort Stewart and off post public schools supporting Fort Stewart and HAAF, has increased over the last several years due to parent education programs and information provided by the School Liaison Office (SLO) and other family support related programs on Fort Stewart/HAAF.

There are no DDES schools on HAAF. Children residing on HAAF are zoned for Chatham County Public Schools. Four percent of the students enrolled in Chatham County Schools are military-connected children. Like Liberty County, graduation and curriculum requirements for Chatham County Schools are determined by the Georgia State Department of Education. Chatham County Schools have a gifted program called SEARCH (Students Exploring and Reasoning for Creative Environments). Also unique to the Chatham County Schools are the Options Academies. There are 15 academies in Chatham County. They are designated at specific schools offering rigorous academic and performing arts programs.

Partnerships have been developed with off post agencies to provide "tools" for parents in supporting their children in schools. One such partnership is Parent University, which is a non-profit organization operated by parents for parents. Prior to the deployment, parents were surveyed to determine what courses would be beneficial to them and their families. Courses were developed based on the parental responses which included Discipline and the Difficult Child, Preparing Children for Pre-School, Effective Homework Techniques, Stress Management, and other courses designed to enhance personal growth and increase parenting skills. A Parent University session was conducted at the zoned Elementary School for HAAF in April. There was no cost for the parents to attend the courses and childcare and lunch were also provided at no cost. Through the initiation of the School Liaison Program, continuity of education has improved greatly at Fort Stewart and HAAF. Over the past two years ceremonies were conducted at which the Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS) Memorandum of Agreement and Guiding Principles were signed and implemented by four school districts (Fort Stewart, Liberty, Bryan, and Chatham Counties). Local action plans were developed based on the findings of the SETS. As a result of membership in the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) the four school districts received an Interactive Counseling Center with their membership. This teleconferencing computer system enables counselors from the losing school to communicate with the receiving school when a student is in transition. Copies of transcripts, course descriptions, and other records can be reviewed on screen and faxed to either school. This is an excellent tool for counselors when they are placing students in classes.

Professional Development is also provided to school counselors by the MCEC. The training is at the Transition Counselor Institute and is conducted in three phases. This training teaches counselors basic skills to assist students in transition. Subjects include military lifestyle, deployment, social and emotional issues, etc. Phase I and II of this training have been offered at Fort Stewart/HAAF for the past two years and will culminate with Phase I, II, and III training next year. All of these processes are in place and are working.

Another key to ensuring continuity and a smooth transition from school district to school district has been the Youth Action Council, which involves parents, school officials, and support agencies such as Child and Youth Services (CYS) and Army Community Service. This forum addresses the total well being of military youth and those issues that affect the student's academics as well as their leisure activities. An action plan was also developed addressing key transition issues, such as sponsorship, transition labs, transfer of credits, etc. The schools and school districts are very proactive when it comes to the transition issues and continuity of education for our military students. What children see and hear about the war and their feelings about missing their mom or dad in uniform are genuine concerns. In August of 2002 the SLO and Army Family Team Building (AFTB) coordinator begin offering classes on the effects of deployment on children to installation and local area schoolteachers. The training was beneficial in familiarizing teachers with the impacts of deployment on children and youth, and acquainting them with the military support resources available to help build coping skills.

As the deployment progressed and the possibility of casualties was a reality, it became evident that a more comprehensive training would be necessary to address the impact of casualty on a child, and how the school administration and teachers would deal with a casualty and/or serious incident.

In the early stages of the deployment, the SLO and the Family Advocacy Program Manager met with the Crisis Intervention Team from the on post school at Fort Stewart to review their emergency plans and to identify areas where additional resources were required. From these meetings, an information paper was developed which outlined notification procedures and support for children during a tragedy. Follow up measures were taken to ensure the information reached school counselors and teachers.

Throughout the school year, deployment related training was provided to teachers/school staff at schools both on and off post. This training was conducted by staff through Army Community Service, Social Work Services, and the School Liaison program. In addition, trainers from the Military Child Education Coalition provided workshops for school counselors and local Parent Teacher Organizations. Through these proactive steps, schools were informed and prepared for situations requiring student support and care.

CHILD CARE

Quality Child Care is vitally important to soldiers and families both during peacetime and contingency operations. The Army Leadership is aware that childcare and youth programs are a readiness issue. If soldiers are confident that their children are well

cared for and engaged in enrichment programs, it allows them to focus on the mission. Congress and the White House have recognized the military's program as "a model for the nation." To ensure high standards and quality service, Army Child Care and Youth Programs are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National School Age Care Alliance (NSACA), the Family Child Care (FCC) Military Home Accreditation (MHA), and are certified by the Department of Defense (DOD).

Fort Stewart/HAAF CYS has done an excellent job in supporting Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve Component families during contingency operations. CYS programs have been recognized for their excellence and proactive posture in providing contingency related programs and activities to reduce the conflict between parental responsibilities and mission requirements during deployments. CYS is providing the following programs during current deployment operations:

- Expanded hours of operation for hourly care at the Child Development Center (CDC) for monthly Battalion level FRG Meetings.
- Weekly Friday night openings at the CDC for Spouses Night Out.
- Monthly Saturday openings for Spouses Day Out at the CDC and School Age Center.
- Expanded hours of operation at the Middle School and Teen Center on Friday Nights.
- Back up Family Child Care (FCC) homes for emergency child care when existing childcare arrangements are insufficient to support mission requirements. Fort Stewart is a pilot for this program.
- Extended hours, evening, weekend, long term, and hourly care in FCC homes.

- Hourly Respite Care in facilities based or FCC homes for special needs children, stress related issues for parents, and other contingency emergencies.

- Enhanced enrichment programs and activities for Middle School and Teens to include Boys and Girls Club activities, 4-H activities, and once a month family activities.

- Short Term Alternative Child Care (STACC) Sessions for deployment related activities. STACC sessions are on site childcare provided at facilities that have met health, safety, and fire requirements, and the parents are "on site" or in the same facility as the child.

The contingency support outlined above was provided at no cost to the families. We appreciate Congressional support for the funding that allows the CYS program to provide expanded child care/youth supervision operations and request this kind of continued support.

The CYS Mobilization and Contingency (MAC) Plan has been an excellent tool allowing the installation staff to customize their CYS mission support. The "MAC" plans include briefings, memorandums of instructions, after action reports, and planning guidance from previous deployments. A lesson learned from Desert Storm/Shield was to ensure family care plans provided by the units for children in CYS programs were reviewed on an annual basis to ensure plans were current. During recent contingency operations there were few if any problems with family care plans being updated or incorrect. The support of installation leadership in ensuring that family care plans were a priority, was instrumental in CYS being able to provide contingency emergency care when needed.

The CYS contingency services provided during deployments provides soldiers and families with peace of mind, enhancing their well-being and quality of life.